

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, announced Thursday that he will be joining some of his colleagues from Washington on a trip to Iraq to evaluate the progress being made toward elections.

He is also giving people the opportunity to send cards or letters to soldiers and he will make sure they get them before the holidays. The deadline for mailing cards or letters to Iraq for the holidays has already passed.

"Nothing boosts the morale and spirits of Americans in uniform better than a letter from home," said Kirk, promising anyone who wishes to send a holiday card or letter to a family member or friends in Iraq that he will make sure it gets there on time.

He also applauded the work of numerous groups that have been sending the soldiers comfort items and necessities, like the Blue Line for the Front Line group that was started by the Vernon Hills Police Department. Their effort was later joined by the Libertyville Police Department.

At his press conference Thursday, Kirk was joined by Vernon Hills Police Chief Mark Fleischhauer, Libertyville Police Chief Pat Carey and Penny Pullen, president of Republican Women of Wheeling, who provided more than 20 boxes of comfort items for troops.

Vernon Hills police adopted two military units and have sent 112 boxes to the troops. Libertyville provides a dropoff point for items and the department received an anonymous \$1,000 gift to cover postage.

The congressman also recognized the efforts of the eighth-grade students at Winnetka's Washburne Junior High School who are putting together boxes for soldiers.

"I'm grateful for . . . all the volunteers who donated their time and efforts to bring holiday cheer to our troops," he said. "They are providing a much needed boost to our brave Americans in uniform who will stand guard during the holidays," he said.

Cards and letters can be delivered to Kirk's office before noon next Thursday at Suite 200, 102 Wilmot Road in Deerfield. All cards and letters must be properly addressed, with name, rank, unit and military APO, including correct postage.

He also said there are several organizations that people can turn to if they want to help the troops. Those include:

<http://www.adoptaplatoon.org/> , including Operation "Holiday Smile"

<http://www.lettersfromhome.org/> , including its program to ensure every soldier gets mail

<http://www.nmcrrs.org/> , the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

<http://www.aerhq.org/> , Army Emergency Relief

<http://www.afas.org/> , the Air Force Aid Society